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ABSTRACT

Research on the effects of parent participation and training on disabled children's development is reviewed. Studies cite the widespread belief in importance of parent involvement; note the need to distinguish between parental involvement with the child and involvement with the educational program; consider comfortable levels of participation; review professionals' attitudes toward parent involvement, including their expectations about parents' role in educational decision making; summarize strategies to maximize parent participation; review phases of parental involvement; and discuss parents' role in maintaining or increasing students' skills over the summer break. The lack of research on the effects of parent participation and training on educational programing and academic and social achievment despite general agreement on their importance is noted. (CL)

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The Effects of Parent Participation and Training in Educational Programming on the Developmental Achievement of Handicapped Children

A Review of the Literature

Margaret M. Cieslewicz

Parent participation in the educational programming of the handicapped child was associated with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), which mandates parental participation during the development of an individual education plan for the handicapped child. Parental participation needs to be defined in terms of what it is, merely consent giving, or actual implementation by parents of goals and objectives designed in the planning process and how much is effective. Professionals need to look at how they accept parental participation in their domain of education and if they are willing to help train parents to be effective participants.

Educators and parents both need to know, above all, if involvment and training effects the development of the handicapped child. There is little research currently to support this. Additional research is needed to determine the effect of parent participation and training on handicap children's developmental achievement.

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One of the main reasons cited for making mandatory parent participation in planning conferences for the handicapped child is that the education of the child can continue in the home to benefit the child. Turnbull, Turnbull, and Wheat (1983) reviewed the reasons Congress was so strongly in favor of putting parent participation into P.L. 94-142. They showed that witnesses who testified before Congress believed that parent participation is helpful to not only the child, but the schools, and the parents as well. They went on to say that parents are often a force behind educational reform, that parent participation assures the rights of the handicapped child, that parent participation holds schools accountable, and that parents want training, should be trained in educational matters, and that this training of parents will be of benefit to the child.

The role of parents as participants in the exceptional child's education is well agreed upon as an important one for improving services to and as a benefit for the child. Lynch and Stein (1982) conducted a study to investigate parent's participation in and attitudes toward their child's special education program and the ways in which parents of children of different ages, ethnicity program placement, and socio-economic status preceived their participation. From a sample of 400 parents interviewed on a sixty-four item questionaire, 328 of the questionaires were tabulated

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to provide the results. The results indicated that 70% of the parents reported active participation, and 47% reported they felt they contributed to the planning process. They went on to further suggest that though parents see their participation as helpful to their handicapped child, a defintion of active participation in relation to parent involvement in the educational planning of programs for handicapped children must be expanded to determine if active participation is merely attendance by the parent at the planning meeting or if active participation means actual input into the education program and parental implementation of the goals designed during the planning meeting.

MacMillan and Turnbull (1983) felt that a distinction must be made between parental involvement with the child and parental involvement with the educational program. Involvement must be looked at as either beneficial or detrimental to the child and that the degree a parent becomes involved with the educational program and implementation of the program can both help and hinder the child's developmental gains. They felt that parents must be made to realize that their are different levels of involvement and that having the handicapped child become the center of the family is not always the level of involvement necessary. A comfortable level of involvement that allows a family to function along with providing for the handicapped child is seen as the way of best achieving an equal and active participation level. In support of a comfortable level of participation, Schulz (1982)

a parent of a handicapped child agreed that involving a parent in the planning process and establishing parent training programs contributes to the better education of the handicapped child, but felt that professionals who stress active participation must realize that parents, too, have individual needs and that a complete and total commitment by the parent in the handicapped child's programming is not always beneficial. The feeling that professionals and parents need to work cooperatively to establish a level of participation that will be acceptable to the parent and school will only help to increase the total developmental achievement of the handicapped person.

The cooperation between parents and professionals in equal participation in designing educational programs for the handicapped child is seen as important by many educators. How professionals look at parental participation and how willing they are to help parents obtain maximum participation levels is also an important aspect of the parental participation issue.

Shevin (1983) stated that since the inception of parental involvement in the individual education program mandated by P.L.94-142, one must look to see what form of parental involvement is being accepted by professional educators. He felt there are four degrees to which parents are informed and in which parents participate. These are (1) uninformed consent, (2) uninformed participation, (3) informed consent, and (4) informed participation. It is further felt that professionals must strive to ob-

tain informed participation on the part of the parent and through this type of participation the professionals and parents working together will plan programs with the disabled child's best interest in mind.

Attitudes of planning team members about the kinds of activities parents should participate in during an educational planning team meeting were gathered in a questionaire sent to 1,526 Conneticut planning team members from January 1976 to March 1976, Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, and Maxwell (1978). Members of the study were asked to indicate which of twenty-four planning team activities they thought parents should participate in during the planning team meeting. The results indicated that planning team members see parents as information givers, consent givers, and are not expected to participate actively in making decisions about their child's program, and that the role of the parent needs to be defined by the professional with the professional learning how to conduct planning meetings with parents as an intregral part of the planning process for the betterment of the program and the child.

Gress and Carrol (1985) stressed that it is the professionals role to enhance parent participation in the educational programming process. Several ways were suggested that they felt could be used by the professional to insure that parents participate to the fullest. The ways suggested are to find a neutral site, clarify what the planning process is about, provide an opportunity

for input, offering support, and treating parents as individuals. If these training techniques are used by the professional to help parents become more meaningful participants in the planning process, it is felt that this participation will be a benefit to the program designed to help the handicapped child's development.

Yoshida and Gottlieb (1977) presented three phases of parental involvement that show the participation role of parents in the educational programming process. (1) The Input Phase, here the parent is seen as a permission, information, and preference giver. (2) The Process Phase, here the parent is either not invited or chooses not to attend, or is a passive participant or an active equal participant. (3) The Product Phase, here acceptance or rejection by parent of the professional recommendations takes place. They suggested the professionals should look at these three phases on how parents participate in the programming process and determine which of the phases parents at their school fit into, and if this phase is the level of participation that can best produce a successful educational planning session that will benefit the handicapped child's achievement.

Training parents to service their handicapped child's needs is seen as an important way of continuing the programming provided by the school. A study conducted by Wilkins (1983) investigated training parents as a means of continuing service to their handicapped child over the summer months as a way of developing a twelve month program for the handicapped child. The study assumed that parents

who are actively involved in the education process and that when properly trained can bring about significant progress in their child's development. The study was conducted over a three year period with fifteen moderately and severely handicapped students ages two through twenty-one, whose parents volunteered to participate in the training program, and a control group of twenty-five moderately and severely handicapped students ages two through twenty-one, whose parents did not participate in the training program. A variety of instruments were administered to both groups of students that specifically looked at the overall functioning levels of the students during the 1981-82, 1982-83, and 1983-84 school year. Pre-test, post-test, and follow-ups were administered. The overall results showed that handicapped children whose parents trained to deliver services over the summer months showed less regression, a shorter time needed to recover skills lost over the summer, and an increased skill level over the summer break in regular programming.

Parental participation was examined to the extent to which it will enhance the appropriate education of the handicapped child. Morgan (1982) looked at the different types of parental participation and training and concluded that little data had been collected on defining training and actual participation. It is stated that since the implementation of P.L.94-142 five years earlier, very little is known about how parent participation and training has effected educational programming and if it benefits the academic and social achievement of the handicapped child. It is felt that

there is a great need for research to look into parent participation and training in educational programming to see if it does benefit the handicapped child. Yoshida (1982) also proposed that research needs to be done to see if training parents in educational programming and about their rights to participate to the fullest extent possible will increase the performance of the handicapped child.

The literature reveals that it is the popular opinion of both educators and parents that participation, involvement, and training of parents in educational programming will benefit the handicapped child. It further reveals that there is much confusion about the type of participation that is beneficial, the acceptance of the professional regarding parental participation, and the role the professional has in training parents to be active participants.

Though it is agreed that parental participation and training will benefit the handicapped child's developmental achievement, the literature showed that there are very few research studies done to produce concrete evidence that will support this concept. The need for investigation into parental involvement and training to see if current practices and mandates of parental participation have been a success or a failure in regards to the effect it has on the handicapped child's developmental achievement is shown to be a research priority.

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